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AUTHOR Ishii, Satoshi; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The communication practices and training in communication activities of classroom teachers in Hawaii were examined by surveying 370 elementary, intermediate, and secondary school teachers in Hawaii. The results supported the claims that the classroom constitutes an ongoing communication event composed of varied speech activities and that the teachers engage in a variety of speech activities in the typical school week. The data revealed that the teachers devoted a mean number of 38.4 hours per week to oral activities, focusing particularly on lecturing, giving instructions, making assignments, asking/answering questions, conducting class discussions, and appraising student performances. A majority of the teachers acknowledged training in these six oral activities and little or no training in the other six activities that were surveyed. A good share of those who took a college speech course had taken a general course in the basics open to all undergraduates but not a course specifically designed for teacher trainees. The conclusion reached from these results was that a significantly large population of practicing classroom teachers in Hawaii have had little or no training in the oral communication theory and skills needed for classroom use. (RL)

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COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

by Satoshi Ishii, Donald Klopf, and Ronald Cambra*

Theorists in contemporary educational practices universally agree that the essence of teaching is communication and that schools constitute oral communication environments.[1] Speaking and listening are basic to classroom interaction with the teacher and student linked in a system of reciprocal communication[2], and those two communication practices are fundamental as well in teacher-parent, teacher-counselor, teacher-administrator, and teacher-teacher communication exchanges. Such exchanges can occur in a variety of school settings--the halls, lunchroom, offices as well as the classroom--for varied purposes. Teachers transmit information, explain procedures and processes, ask and answer questions, deal with conflict, motivate, and create an atmosphere conducive to learning.[3] Hence, the educational environment "is a giant, multi-faceted communication event composed of a variety of communication encounters."[4]

Given these circumstances, it would seem reasonable to assume that prospective teachers should receive considerable formal classroom training in speaking skills, or, as two researchers claim, "that a major thrust of a student teacher's experience must involve communication training."[5] Educational associations have clearly established the need for such training, as the educational literature attests. References to teachers needs to be skillful communicators, and to understand oral communication processes like group development and dynamics, interpersonal relationships, listening, human relations, intergroup interactions, cross-cultural communication and nonverbal communication are replete in the literature.[6] Certainly, the theorists in the speech field argue that such instruction is essential.[7]

What is the situation? Are prospective teachers being trained in the speaking skills? Are they receiving formal classroom training and/or in-service training in speech? In this paper, answers to the questions specifically relate to the situation in Hawaii and the research reported here deals solely with that part of the United States.

METHOD

To answer the questions about the speech training of perspective teachers, it was necessary to first determine the nature of the communication practices teachers normally engage in. A list was

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*Ishii is Assistant Professor, Otsuma Women's University, Tokyo; Klopf is Prcfessor and Cambra, Associate Professor, Department of Speech, University of Hawaii. Prepared for the annual convention of the Japanese Association of Current English, October 3-4, 1981, Nagoya, Japan.

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compiled through a study of the literature and this was tested on a small group. After revision, a final list was arrived at as shown in Table 1. The list was distributed as a questionnaire to elementary and secondary school teachers in the public and private schools.

In addition to being asked which of the communication activities they take part in during a typical week of teaching, the teachers were requested to note the number of hours spent in each activity, whether their college education included training in each activity, and whether they have students present oral reports in class and discuss in small groups. Biographical data was also gathered.

The 370 respondents represented 22 elementary, 3 intermediate, and 11 secondary schools of which 31 were public and 5 private. Sixty four percent taught more than 10 years with the range from 1 to 30 years, and the mean 12.7 years. Sixty six percent were educated at the University of Hawaii. Eighty two other universities were attended by one or more of the remainder. No speech teachers participated in the survey.

RESULTS

Table 1 summarizes the respondent's replies. For each of the twelve communication activities noted, the mean number of hours devoted to each activity during a typical teaching week is given along with the percentage of respondents whose college education included training in each activity. A closer examination of the respondents' replies offers further insights.

HOURS DEVOTED

The number of hours devoted to lecturing ranged from none to 30 hours per week. Twenty-five respondents (6.8 percent) did not lecture while 24 (6.6 percent) lectured 20 to 30 hours per week. The subject matter appears to dictate the method of instruction since most of those doing the least amount of lecturing are either teachers of special education classes where individualized instruction predominates or kindergarten teachers who dispense little or no information. Those who lecture the most represent all subject areas with the secondary school teachers the more numerous. The same reasoning apparently applies to oral reporting. Students in 76.2 percent of the cases report orally in class with little of this occurring at the lower elementary levels, in special education classes and in art classes but much in the upper elementary levels and in secondary school classes.

As the table indicates, the first six activities on the list demand the most of the time of most teachers. Each involves an average of 4 or more hours per week. However, in each case, there is a considerable range in the number of hours among the respondents with the variance seemingly caused for the most part by the subject matter taught or the year in school of the students.

Only 1.1 percent of the respondents fail to spend any time giving instructions and the teachers who make up this group work with kinder-

garten children. Thirty five hours is the extent of the range for time spent giving instructions and one teacher falls at that extreme, a teacher who instructs art classes in which apparently much direction-giving is necessary.

Type of Oral Activity	MEAN NUMBER OF HOURS DEVOTED TO ACTIVITY PER WEEK	PERCENT WHOSE COLLEGE EDUCATION INCLUDED TRAINING IN ACTIVITY
1. Lecturing on course's subject	6.4 hours	55.6%
2. Giving instructions/ making assignments	5.5	63.0%
3. Asking questions	4.0	64.4%
4. Answering questions	4.1	54.5%
5. Conducting class discussions	4.9	59.9%
6. Appraising student performances	5.3	64 6%
7. Speaking with immigrant students	1.2	7.6%
8. Participating in school meetings	1.3	18.0%
9. Working on committees	1.1	31.9%
10. Reporting orally to co-workers or supervisors	1.3	29.4%
11. Participating in evaluations of teacher job performance	0.6	34.8%
12. Discussing with co-workers	2.7	29.7%
N = 370		

Table 1. Oral Activities of Hawaii School Teachers

The majority of the respondents average about an hour per day asking and answering questions even though the range for asking is none to 25 hours per week and answering is none to 30 hours. Those who ask and answer numerous questions tend to be the arts/humanities/social studies teachers although a few mathematics or science teachers appear among them as well.

Conducting class discussions consumes about 5 hours per week on the average with 87.3 percent of the respondents claiming to conduct

small group discussions in class. But only 25 respondents (6.5 percent) spend more than ten hours in this activity. Each of the 25 persons teach in the arts/humanities/social studies areas. Those among the 63 respondents (20.8 percent) who devote an hour or less to discussion tend to be math, special education, or lower-level elementary school teachers.

The number of hours spend appraising student performance ranges from a minimum of none to a maximum of 40 with the mean as the table shows of 5.3 hours per week. The five teachers (1.4 percent) who appraise for 30 or more hours per week teach reading courses at the elementary and intermediate school levels.

The remaining six activities obviously do not consume a great deal of time for the typical teacher. However, in each case, there are a few respondents who put in an inordinate amount of time. Six (1.7 percent) spend ten or more hours speaking to immigrant students but a majority (58.6 percent) do not spend any time at all. The six work with immigrant students on a part-time or full-time basis while most of the other respondents have few, if any, in their classes. The argument has been advanced, however, that in the near futures more and more teachers will face immigrant children. An influx of refugees from countries like Cambodia, Cuba, and Viet Nam and of immigrants from many other nations will bring immigrant children to hundreds of classes.[8]

Although the typical teacher spends about an hour a week in school meetings and in committee work, there are a few who average more hours per week in such activity. Department heads apparently constitute the bulk of these people. The same seems to hold true for the oral reporting and job evaluation activities. A few engage in these types of speaking more frequently than the average teacher and these people appear to be supervisors or department heads.

The final activity, co-worker discussion, takes up several hours each week for the typical teacher responding to the questionnaire. Three (0.9 percent) for some reason spend fifteen or more hours in such activity.

Several observations merit attention about the hours per week devoted to oral activities. The respondents' replies support the claims that the essence of teaching is oral communication and that the school is an oral communication environment. Almost every teacher who participated in the research reported here spends considerable time speaking. Most of this talk occurs with students--lecturing, making assignments, asking and answering questions, conducting discussions, and appraising performance. Nonetheless almost every teacher interacts with co-workers, administrators, and parents at meetings or while working on committees, and occasionally each participates in an evaluation of his or her job performance or that of fellow faculty members. The teaching profession apparently is one which relies heavily on oral communication.

Interestingly, the typical teacher, if this research is an accurate measure, is not merely a dispenser of information. The teaching role seems to incorporate features like those of a manager of the teaching-learning process. To be prepared for this larger role, the teacher not

only needs to be competent in the traditional communication concerns of voice, articulation, and information organization, the teacher, as the table suggests, needs to be able to do more--to disseminate information, appraise performance, ask/answer questions, conduct discussions, participate in group meetings, interact with co-workers and supervisors, and for a few communicate across cultures, all of which are speaking skills. The teacher communicates for a variety of reasons not just to impart information or instruct.

A final observation concerns the subject matter and the grade taught. Certain subjects appear to lend themselves nicely to classroom oral interaction. The arts, humanities, and social studies are among these. Others do not. Mathematics and the sciences, particularly those with laboratory work, fall in this group. The students are busy in class working on problems or lab experiments making it unnecessary or virtually impossible for much oral instruction to occur. Also, talk may not be as vital in the lower grades, kindergarten especially, since the respondents who teach at the lower levels report that less formal oral instruction goes on.

AMOUNT OF TRAINING

The table also reveals the percentage of the respondents who were trained in the oral activities listed. A majority had training in the first six areas listed and little or none in the last six. The activity which was most frequently checked was the appraisal of student performance. Asking questions and giving instructions ranked second and third in frequency, and, as to be expected, speaking with immigrants ranked last, with 7.6 percent trained in this activity.

Forty-seven respondents (12.7 percent) had no training whatsoever to prepare them for the oral activities, 29 (7.8 percent) acknowledged training in one activity, 31 (8.3 percent) were trained in two, and 33 (8.6 percent) in three. In most cases, the training came as a part of the respondents' period of practice teaching when the field work supervisor or supervising teacher gave them guidance in the oral skills. University of Hawaii graduates constitute the bulk (77.0 percent) of those with three or less activities checked.

In a dozen cases in which the respondents indicated they had training in each or most of the activities, comments were written in on the questionaire stating that the training was indirect, that is, not obtained in college classes while they were regular students. The training came during practice teaching, in workshops, or institutes attended by the respondents after they had begun to work, or in college classes taken after they had begun to teach. The comments tended to be negative, suggesting that the authors felt they were inadequately prepared to teach by the schools they attended.

Of those respondents who have taken undergraduate oral communication courses, most received only what was available in the general speech course open to all majors. Only a half dozen recall enrolling in a basic speech course specifically designed for teacher trainees, although others

reported no recollection of the exact content and this might have been teacher-oriented. Those who graduated from the University of Hawaii in the last twenty years more than likely would have taken a general course. The University offered no basic course during that period directed to teacher-trainees. In 1980 such a course became a requirement.

The responses concerning the amount of training support the national research evidence. In brief, the research concludes that a significantly large population of practicing classroom teachers has had little or no training in the communication theory and skills needed for classroom use.[9] The Hawaii situation seems identical with few teachers having been formally trained to assume the communication tasks demanded by today's educational environment.

SUMMARY

There appears to be agreement among theorists and educators involved in the preparation of teachers that the classroom constitutes an oral communication situation for which teachers should be properly trained. As a consequence, it would appear to be a reasonable assumption that teachers receive a good amount of speech training. Is this the case? Is the classroom a beehive of communication? Are teachers trained in the oral communication skills and theories? The research reported here undertook to answer the questions by investigating the speech educational background and practices of a selected population of teachers, specifically those in the state of Hawaii.

The results support the claims that the classroom constitutes an ongoing communication event composed of varied speech activities and that the teacher engages in a variety of speech activities in the typical school week. Approximately 38 hours per week are devoted to oral communication processes of one kind or another by the average teacher, undoubtedly making speech the principal classroom activity.

Are the teachers trained in school to engage in this activity? The answer is that a slim majority have been formally trained in some of the activities while the balance have had little or no training. A good share of those who took a college speech course had a general course in the basics open to all undergraduates but not a course specifically designed for teacher trainees. The observation seems defensible that a significantly large population of practicing classroom teachers in Hawaii has had little or no training in the oral communication theory and skills needed for classroom use.

FOOTNOTES

[1] For evidence supporting this point see C. Kyle Packer and T. Packer, "Cybernetics, Information Theory and the Educative Process," in Teaching: Vantage Points for Study, ed. by R. T. Hyman (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1968), p. 66; Ned A. Flanders, "Basic Skills Derived from a Model of Speaking and Listening," Journal of Teacher Education, 24 (Spring, 1973), 24; George G. Stern, "Measuring Noncognitive Variables in Research on Teaching," in Handbook of Research on Teaching, ed. by N. L. Gage (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), p. 398; R. T. Hyman, "Introduction," in Hyman, Teaching: Vantage Points, p. 13; R. G. Martin, "Communication and the Act of Teaching: A Footnote to Models of Teaching," Journal of Teacher Education, 22 (Winter, 1971), 424.

[2] Elizabeth Meagher Lynn, "In-Service Teacher Education in Classroom Communication," Communication Education, 26 (January 1977), 1.

[3] Jody L. Nyquist and James L. Booth, "Instructional Communication: A Basic Course for Teachers," Communication Education, 26 (January 1977), 13.

[4] Nyquist and Booth, 13.

[5] Hal A. Altmann and Donald B. Black, "Enhancing Student Self-Concept with Communication Training," Small Group Behavior, 9 (February 1978), 80.

[6] Some of the studies including references to teacher needs in the communication areas are: Helene Borke and Joan W. Burstyn, "The New Teacher and Interpersonal Relations in the Classroom," Journal of Teacher Education, 21 (Fall, 1970), 378; Dwight Webb, "Teacher Sensitivity: Affective Input on Students," Journal of Teacher Education, 22 (Winter, 1971), 455; Stephen Martin Sperber, "Development of a Training Program for Teachers Using Interpersonal Process, Communications, and Problem Solving Skills," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1972); George M. Gazda, et al., Human Relations Development: A Manual for Educators (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1973), p. 8; James M. Calonico and Beth Ann Calonico, "Classroom Interaction: A Sociological Approach," Journal of Educational Research, 66 (Dec. 1972), 168; Asa G. Hilliard, "Cross-Cultural Teaching," Journal of Teacher Education, 18 (Spring, 1967), 32-35.

[7] See he following reports for arguments advocating speech instruction: Lousene G. Rousseau, "Speech Education in the Normal Schools--A Survey," Quarterly Journal of Speech Education, 8 (June, 1922), 217; Donald C. Bryant, "Speech for Teachers," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 24 (April, 1938) 246-47; Preston H. Scott, "Speech Training for Teachers," Southern Speech Journal, 8 (Nov. 1942), 34; Harry G. Barnes, "Basic Concepts of Speech Education," Speech Teacher, 1 (Jan. 1952), 14-19 (reprinted in Dimensions of Oral Communication Instruction, ed. By Keith Erickson (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1970), p. 33; Julia C. Piquette, "Needed: Adequate Speech Training for Elementary Education Majors," Speech Teacher, 9 (Nov., 1960), 276; Robert W. Vogelsand and Ernest E. Ettlich, "NDEA Institues: A Challenge to Speech Educators," Speech Teacher, 15 (1966), 187; G. M.

Phillips, "The Oral Communication Revolution," Pennsylvania School Journal (April, 1968) (reprinted in Dimensions of Oral Communication Instruction, ed. by Erickson, pp. 257-258); "Speech Education in Teacher-Training Institutions: Report of the Committee on Speech Education in Teachers Colleges and Normal Schools," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 16 (Feb. 1930), 45; "Speech in Teacher Education: Committee on Teacher Education," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 32 (Feb. 1946), 80, 92; Paul Walwick, "The Status of Speech Instruction in the Elementary Schools," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1967); Donald Kenneth Orban, "A Survey of Speech Education in the Public Senior High Schools of the United States, 1969-1970," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1973); Anderson, "Study of the Basic Speech-Communication Course"; and Maxine Trauernicht, "Speech Proficiency of Teachers in Training," Speech Teacher, 13 (Jan. 1964), 16-20; Robert J. Kibler and Larry L. Barker, eds., Conceptual Frontiers in Speech Communication: Report of the New Orleans Conference on Research and Instructional Development (Feb. 11-16, 1968), (New York: Speech Association of America, 1969), pp. 28-29 (Recommendations #17, 18, 19, and 21); Douglas Ehninger, "Report of the Committee on the Scope of Rhetoric and the Place of Rhetorical Studies in Higher Education," in The Prospect of Rhetoric: Report of the National Development Project (of the SCA), ed. by Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 216; and see, for example, Recommendations R 4.1, R 5.1, R 6.1, and P. 3.1 in P. Judson Newcombe and R. R. Allen, eds., New Horizons for Teacher Education in Speech Communication: Report of the Memphis Conference of Teacher Educators (Skokie, IL: National Textbook Co., 1974), pp. 134-139.

[8] Donald Klopf, "The Intercultural Perspective on Human Communication," a key-note address for the national convention of the Australian Communication Association, July 8, 1981, Sydney, Australia.

[9] Lynn, 2.